



“The older the singer the better!”  
On the Role of Creativity in  
Passing down Liturgical Music from the  
19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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If we want to understand how the performance practice of Byzantine singers has changed since the reforms of Chrysanthos in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, we must take into account the importance of the medial aspects of the new notation system, which was introduced as print types by Chrysanthos and his students.<sup>1</sup> This late media revolution of printed notation in the history of Byzantine music was accompanied by a re-invention of national church music traditions. These were created through the distribution of a classical Late Greek-Byzantine repertory.<sup>2</sup> The Greek text was translated into other languages and the melodies were modified according to the prosody of the national language. In some countries, this was the first time that the national language had been introduced into church music.<sup>3</sup> Another aspect of this process of

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysanthos, *Θεωρητικὸν Μέγα τῆς Μουσικῆς* [*Theoretikon about music*] (Trieste, 1832); reprint (Athens, 1977).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the current modern Byzantine notation was introduced according to a system of Chrysanthos, who simplified the older notation. The singers Chourmouzos Chartophylakos and Gregorios Protopsaltes transcribed the formulas of the *melos* (μέλος) according to the *New Method* and unified several regional traditions. This reform was very powerful, because it was related to the beginning of printed notation, the distribution of printed books in Orthodox churches and the translation of a *classical Constantinopolitan* repertory into the languages of national traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Petros Peloponnesios, who was Domestikos and Lampadarios at the patriarchate in Istanbul (Constantinople) from 1764 to 1778, wrote down a large collection of the music which was transmitted orally by mastersingers. Thus, he became of the most important creators of this *classical Constantinopolitan* repertory.

<sup>3</sup> In Romania, Petru Efesiu, a student of the three teachers, was the first to publish the Greek *Anastasimatarion* and the *Syntomon Doxastarion* 1820 in Bucharest. Together with his students Macarie Iermonahul and Anton Pann he translated the Greek texts of the chant into

creation and transcription was the definitive form taken by the new notation.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Changes in Notation during the Reform of Chrysanthos

In 18<sup>th</sup> century practice, the previous notation was based on a very different concept of performance and of composition. The freedom which characterises it can be demonstrated by means of a brief example:



Ex. 1.

This is a copy of the notation system used by Bereketēs, who lived between 1680 and 1715, the Late Byzantine Round notation. The first neume at the beginning is written with a *hypostatic sign* underneath it: a *lygisma* (λόγισμα). The “exegetic” transcription by Chourmouzos, one of the great teachers of the *New Method*, resolves the *lygisma* in the form of a long melisma.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the new notation eliminated any *hypostatic sign*, but in transcribing the *hypostatic lygisma* the modern notation correspondingly did away with the freedom of the “exegetis.” This was the freedom of the singer to decide, in the context of the ritual, whether the *lygisma* was to be sung as a brief ornament or as an elaborated melisma. The length depends on the liturgical rank of the feast and how many people are participating in it.

Romanian. A study by Costin Moisil contains more information on the melodic adaption to the Romanian language.

<sup>4</sup> An overview of the different periods of more and more detailed transcriptions of the *melos* can be found in Konstantinos Terzopoulos’ contribution to this book.

<sup>5</sup> Athens, Ethnika Bibliothēka tēs Ellados, MITT αρ. χφ 712, fol. 86–94.

A facsimile of this autograph by Chourmouzos Chartophylakos is published in the CD booklet: *Χερουβικο ψαλλόμενον και εις τους οκτώ ήχους Πέτρον Μπερεκέτη – ψάλλει ο Δημήτριος Νεραντζής Πρωτοψάλτης Τήνου*, Μνημεία Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής – Οκτάηχα Μέλη και Συστήματα vol. 13 (22 CD), ed. Manolēs K. Chatzēgiakoumēs (Athens, 2002), vol. 4 (CD 7/8), pp. 131–134.



But this sign does not indicate “free improvisation”; it stands for the establishment of a mode, singing out the first syllable. In this way, the old notation offered the singer nothing more than the skeleton of a cherubim chant. This skeleton comes alive through the talent of an educated singer, who knows the typical formulas of the *ēchos* in the *papadikian* style. *Ēchos* (sound) is the Greek term for mode, and *papadikian* is the name for the soloistic or psaltic style, which is used for the cherubim chant.<sup>6</sup> In this example, the older notation could be written down once only and yet indicate a whole cycle of cherubim chant for every *ēchos*. The singer would merely sing it in the *ēchos* of the week, and thus every melisma for the *lygisma* differs according to the modal formulas of the *ēchos*. My example is the Chourmouzos transcription for the First or Plagal First *ēchos*, the Dorian or Hypodorian mode on D.<sup>7</sup>

This example shows that a singer today is very dependent on the transcription of the reformers and that some forms of the older notation seem unable to indicate the historical changes in style. There are different ways to use the Round notation. The next example is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century kalophonic *stichērarion* from Yeniköy, which is now part of Istanbul.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Papadikian* is called the slowest and soloistic style in Orthodox church music. Its name is taken by a theoretical introduction, *παπαδική*, which usually stands at the beginning of a chant book called *akolouthiai* (*ακολουθιαί*). It was in use from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and it contains the soloistic chants of Lauds (Orthros), Vespers (Hesperinos) and the Divine Liturgies (Orthodox mass forms).

<sup>7</sup> *Megālai hypostáseis* or *cheironomic signs*: The majority of these forms exist in Late Byzantine sources (14<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century) and some didactic pieces are known from that period, which teach the singer to use the *hypostases*. The most popular is the *Great Ison* (*mega ison*), which is ascribed to Ioannes Koukouzeles (14<sup>th</sup> century). It teaches the *thesis*: The signs were sung as melodic formulas that often belongs to one *echos* and to one *style* or *melos*. But the term *melos* is also used for the high art of elaborating a traditional chant. Therefore, the *hypostatic* or *cheironomic signs* could be realized as brief ornaments, as melodic formulas or as own compositions or arrangements (*kalophonia*) which transform parts of short pieces into a long melismatic composition. The borders are fluent and caused a lot of scholarly arguments, since they were eliminated by the reform of the *New Method*.

<sup>8</sup> A: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. 25059, fol. 758, in comparison with:  
B: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, A 139 sup., fol. 141' (14<sup>th</sup> century)  
C: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. 40587, fol. 157' (14<sup>th</sup> century)  
D: Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. theol. gr. 136, fol. 143' (12<sup>th</sup> century)



Ex. 2.

The comparison shows that the 18<sup>th</sup>-century version is a kalophonic elaboration of the traditional medieval melody, which could be understood as an interpretation of the *hypostatic signs* of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *stichē-rarion* classified by the Byzantinist Raasted as a revised edition of Koukouzeles.<sup>9</sup> For reasons of space, only a few techniques can be mentioned here:



Ex. 3.

A: This *stichērarion kalophonikon* was rediscovered 2002 in the music department of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, together with 14 other manuscripts, written before and after the reform (ca. 1814) in the new and the old notation. I am lucky to be able to offer a first impression of one of these still unknown sources in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Jørgen Raasted, "Koukouzeles Revision of the Sticharion and Sinai gr. 1230," *Laborare fratres in unum: Festschrift in honour of László Dobszay's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday*, ed. David Hiley & Janka Szendrei (Hildesheim, 1995), pp. 261-277.



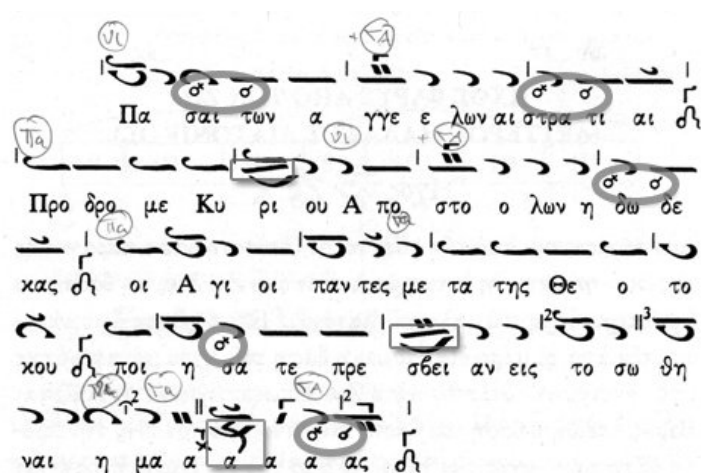
The intonation formula is so elaborate that it indicates not only the *ēchos* of the *stichēron*, but also all the relationships to the other modes passed through during the piece.

Thus, just a few text lines from the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *stichēron* have grown...

**δ' (G)** τω-το (ενηχιμα)  
**δ' (G)** τω τρι-τιω της ερωτησεως το πετρε- φιλεις  
 με : **πλδ' (C)**  
**παλιν δ'** τω τρι-τιω : τω τρι-τιω- της ερωτησεως το  
 πετρε φιλεις με :  
**πλδ' (C)** πετρε φιλεις με : **πλδ' (C)** πετρε φιλεις με  
 φιλεις με πετρε :  
**πλδ' (C)** πετρε φιλεις με : **πλβ' (E)**  
 το τριττον της αρνησεως : **α' (a)**  
 ο χριστος διορθωσατο : **γ' νανα (F enharmonic)**  
 διο και προς τον κρυφιογνοστην οσιμων : **πλδ' (C)**  
 το-το (κρατιμα) **πλδ' νανα (C enharmonic)**  
 διο και προς τον κρυφιογνοστην οσιμων :  
**πλδ' νανα (C enharmonic)**

...into one long melismatic composition in *papadikan* style with a great many text repetitions and terismata. The formula *παλιν* is not the name of an *ēchos*, but merely means "again": The singer indicates that he is starting from the beginning again with his own melismatic elaboration of the traditional tune. If this tune is taken from one *stichērarion*, revised by Koukouzelēs, nobody can say that this 18<sup>th</sup>-century "composition" is not a "Koukouzelian" piece.

After the reform of the *New Method* it was much easier to sing Byzantine church music, but oral transmission still took place despite the modern notation since many ornaments were no longer indicated due to the abandonment of the *hypostatic signs*. Thus, they were sung according to the practice of the older singers, who had learned the older system.



Ex. 4.

In 1997, 180 years after the reform, Georgios Konstantinou published an introduction into Greek church music, which is now identified with the “school of Athens”: the Greek-Byzantine choir and its director Lykourgos Angelopoulos. Konstantinou re-introduced four signs from the earlier Late Byzantine notation – some of them are hypostases, but here they are used as ornament signs – and he used different alteration signs to indicate, in great detail, how a degree of the mode should be intoned a microtone higher or lower. The new notation of Konstantinos has become a medium to fix microtonal shifts.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Marianic hymn from the 8<sup>th</sup> Ode of the *Great Paraklētikos* Canon by the emperor Theodoros II Laskaris (13<sup>th</sup> century). The Music is according to the Heirmologion of Ioannēs Protopsaltis (19<sup>th</sup> century).

This example is taken from the introduction by Georgios N. Konstantinou: *Θεορία και Πράξη της Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής* [*Theory and Practice of Church Music*], (Athens, 1997), vol. 1, p. 147. A recording based on this edition was made by the Greek-Byzantine Choir directed by Lykourgos Angelopoulos: *Hymnes à la Très Sainte Mère de Dieu*, published 1995 by JADE 9601 / HM CD 87 (74321 32725–2).

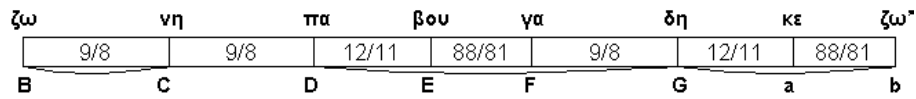


## 2. The Art of Microtonal Intonation – as Example the *Ēchos Varys* and the *Ēchos Legetos*

Nowadays, the main point of interest in the practice of the older singers is the intonation of microtones and the art of singing ornaments. This is a reduced understanding of the art of *melos* and *kalophonia*. This art, in the written-out form of a composition, was called "exēgēsis" (ἐξηγήσις) by Chourmouziotis in his autograph.<sup>11</sup>

Here, I will concentrate on the use of microtones in the practice of the older singer generation:

One characteristic in the practice of older singers is their frequent habit of intoning the *papadikan* form of *ēchos varys* (heavy *ēchos*) according to the *trochos system*, an intonation which is attributed to Koukouzel and to the graphic illustration of the *Koukouzelian Wheel*.<sup>12</sup> It no longer exists in the modern theory following Chrysanthos, but in the Late Byzantine period up to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was most common system.



Ex. 5.

If we listen to recordings of singers like Thrasylvoulos Stanitsas (1910–1987) or Dionysios Firfiris (1912–1990), passing through the eight modes of *oktoēchos* (οκτώηχος) system and finally turning back to the First *ēchos* (the Dorian D mode) of the beginning, we can hear that they use the *trochos system*. *Ēchos Varys* is intoned here as the F mode, consistently using

<sup>11</sup> Athens, Ethnika Bibliothēka tēs Ellados, MITT αρ. χφ 712, fol. 86'.

<sup>12</sup> The tone system is organized in *disjunct tetrachords* and scholars, who are not familiar with this system may reminded of the *Dasia system* in the Carolingian *Musica enchiriadis* treatise from 9<sup>th</sup> century. It is the earliest source which testifies this tone system:

→ formulas of *kyrioi echoi* →

Γ – Α – Β – C | D – E – F – G | a – h – c – d | e – f# – g – aa | hh

← formulas of *plagioi echoi* ←

Thus, the *ēchos varys* is built up on the *ison* on B flat of the lowest tetrachord.

the tritone B as fourth degree, but the F mode is transposed a fifth lower on B flat.<sup>13</sup>

But Chrysanthos teaches the modern intonation of *ēchos varys* according to the *systēma teleion*:

ζω	νη	πα	βου	γα	δη	κε	ζω'
88/81	9/8	12/11	88/81	9/8	12/11	9/8	
H	C	D	E	F	G	a	h

Ex. 6.

This is the only form of *ēchos varys* as it is used in the Bulgarian tradition and also the usual form for Greek-Orthodox singers nowadays.

Another very special and difficult mode is the *ēchos legetos* (ήχος λέγετος). This diatonic E-mode changes the *ēchos* during the evolution of the *oktōēchos* system. It is difficult to sing because the *ison* and the *finalis* E are on a degree which has almost no pure interval to the other degrees:

νη	πα	βου	γα	δη	κε	ζω'	νη"
2500/2187	27/25	27/25	9/8	9/8	800/729	27/25	
C	D	E	F	G	a	h	c

Ex. 7.

Not only practitioners but also theorists had different ideas about the “correct” intonation of *ēchos legetos*.<sup>14</sup> If we listen to various Greek-orthodox singers, we find different intonations that try to stress the dis-

<sup>13</sup> Both are singing Bereketes *Theotoke parthene*. This long papadikan composition passes through the eight modes and finally turns back to the First: here, I discuss the intonation of *Varys* (Track 7) the Third Plagal or Seventh *echos*. The recording of Thrasyvoulos Stanitsas was made in February 1980. According to the publisher of this recording, Stanitsas is the last great singer of a traditional school which can be traced back to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The recording of Dionysios Firfiris is made in April 1989. Today a lot of singers regard him as an authority of a lost tradition.

«Θεοτόκε Παρθένε» Πέτρον Μπερεκέτη – ψάλλον ο Θρασύβουλος Στανίτσας, Αρχών Πρωτοψάλτης του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου, και ο Πατήρ Διονύσιος Φιρφίρης, Πρωτοψάλτης Πρωτάτου Αγ. Όρους, Μνημεία Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής – Οκτάηχα Μέλη και Συστήματα vol. 13 (22 CDs), ed. Manolēs K. Chatzēgiakoumēs (Athens, 2002), vol. 2 (CD 3/4).

<sup>14</sup> Simon Karas: *Εκ Συμφωνιών, κατ' Αρμενικὰς Μεσότητες, τα Μελωδικὰ Διαστήματα* (Athens, 1989), p. 7.;





sonances through a more or less low E, which is between E and E flat.<sup>15</sup> It seems that this intonation is a personal preference of some educated singers or *protopsaltes* (πρωτοψάλτες) as well as the art of ornamenting, and it is probable that this individual art was sometimes part of a regional tradition.

Leonidas Sphēkas is the fastest singer that I ever heard singing this long and artificial composition based on the text of the *Polyeleos Psalm 44*. The reason is that he is not bound by the notation, because he knows the skeleton which lies in the form of phrases behind all the ornaments written out by the composer Chourmouzios in modern notation. The art of the protopsaltis Sphēkas reminds me of the transcription of Johann Sebastian Bach’s piano music by Wanda Landowska, because like Chourmousios, Bach did not trust the musicians and notated every ornament.

So notation does not necessarily have to be understood as a medium of perfect reproduction. It may also lead us back to forms which allowed for a good deal of invention. Despite this, the singer that takes a CD player for a teacher is probably not going to be the one to keep the tradition alive. Neither medium is a perfect substitute for the oral tradition of transmission.

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Simon Karas: *Μέθοδος της Ελληνικής Μουσικής – Θεωρητικόν [Method of the Hellenic Music – Theoretikon]*, 2 vol., (Athens, 1982); vol. 2, p. 181.

*Στοιχεώδης Διδασκαλία της Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής Εκπομπήσια επι τη βάσει του Ψαλτηρίου υπο της Επιτροπής του Οικοθμενικού Πατριαρχείου εν Έτει 1883* (Istanbul, 1888; reprint: Athens, 1978), p. 14.

Ioannis Zannos: *Ichos und Makam – Vergleichende Untersuchungen zum Tonsystem der griechisch-orthodoxen Kirchenmusik und der türkischen Kunstmusik*, Orpheus-Schriftenreihe zu Grundfragen der Musik, ed. Martin Vogel (Bonn, 1974), p. 86.

- <sup>15</sup> Metropolit Nikodēmos Vallēndras uses a very low E, singing a Katavasi tropar of Petros Peloponnēsios: *Ανθολογία Ογδοή: Καταβασίες Πέτρου Πελοποννησίου (Σύνθεση περ. 1764/1770) – ψάλλει ο Σεβασμιότατος Νικόδημος Βαλληνδράς, Μητροπολίτης Πατρών, Μνημεία Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής – Ανθολογίες*, 7 vol. (10 CDs), ed. Manolēs K. Chatzēgiakoumēs (Athens, 2000), vol. 6 (CD 8, Track 2).

Leonidas Sphēkas intones E more moderate, the a is sometimes a nearly pure fourth, sometimes higher, when attracted by b (h). The *Kratima* in the final doxology of a famous *Polyeleos* composition by Chourmouzios:

*Ανθολογία Δεκατή: Τριαδικά Πολυελέων (19ος αι.) – ψάλλει ο Λεωνίδας Σφήκας, Πρωτοψάλτης Αθηνών, Μνημεία Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής – Ανθολογίες*, 7 vol. (10 CDs), ed. Manolēs K. Chatzēgiakoumēs (Athens, 2000), vol. 7 (CD 10, Track 1).